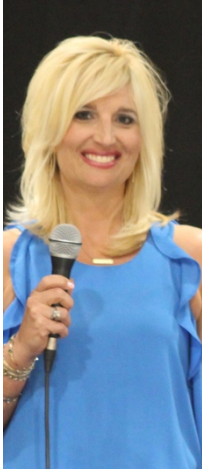


Learning What Grace Really Means

Jennifer Howell



My testimony is one of eternal security and sanctification. In 1981, I walked the aisle of my local church to profess Jesus as my personal Savior. I knew the facts, but I don't know if I actually understood the depth of what was going on in my life as a ten-year old. I felt an emotional tug in my heart to "walk the aisle," but I never want to base my salvation on feelings because feelings come and go. And I am an emotional person anyway.

I grew up in a loving Christian home, and I was always taken to church. I attended church Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night. I was there every time the door was open or there was an activity. I was a part of a very large youth group. My parents shared with me the Bible and that God the Father loved me and gave His Son to die for me.

But, as I grew older, I remained a babe in Christ. I loved God, and I wanted to be a good Christian--but I didn't know how. I would sometimes confuse my salvation with my sanctification. I sometimes wondered if I would really make it to Heaven. As wonderful as I thought I was, I knew that I wasn't. I knew right from wrong. I knew that I was a sinner. And I knew that God was so magnificent and majestic!

When my teenage sweetheart, John, and I married, we struggled finding a church home. He wasn't comfortable with a large church setting in which I grew up, so we tried a few options, including a home church. We struggled settling on what was best for our new family and we were in limbo for several months.

One Saturday evening, John explained to me that he was writing a story on a new local pastor and really needed to visit the church he was pastoring to complete the story. I half-heartedly agreed but jokingly quipped, "Hey don't expect me to join this small church or attend it regularly." (About five years later, John began pastoring a much smaller church in which we were involved for over 16 years!)

While studying the Bible and listening to Dr. Dick Hill teach the Bible, the Word became alive to me. The Bible had never been so understandable. The love of God just oozed out of Brother Dick. God used him to teach me about how we are justified by grace through faith alone in Christ alone. I also learned about sanctification, which is the Christian life. I'll never

forget how God used him to teach me about grace and that God wants me to have a personal, private, intimate, relationship with Him.

John and I became very involved in the church where Brother Dick pastored. We taught a young adult Sunday School class and worked with the youth group.

In 1993, we took the youth group to my first IKTHOOS camp at King's Arrow Ranch near Hattiesburg, MS. The cabins and campgrounds were quite primitive, with bugs and outdoor bathroom facilities. It was a princess's worst nightmare! But more than the living conditions, I remember the message of grace presented over and over again by all of the pastors. Through all of the teaching lessons the pastors and teachers honed in on the point that Jesus Christ did all of the work on the cross, and that people could know beyond a shadow of doubt that they were going to Heaven by trusting in Christ completely to save them.

No one has to walk an aisle to be saved. Being baptized by water doesn't save a person; although it is wonderful because it is a picture and public testimony of what happens to a believer spiritually. We learned that a person didn't have to make sure his good deeds outweighed the bad ones. It is not necessary for a person to make sure he attended church a certain number of times. What an amazing weight was lifted from me! The verse that made the biggest impact on me that week was 1 John 5:13, which says, "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may KNOW that you have eternal life."

I knew the facts. II Corinthians 5:21 says, "For God made Him (Jesus Christ) who knew no sin to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." John 3:16 says "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." That's forever and ever and ever! Hell will be awful. Hell will be hot. Hell will be miserable and scary, but the worst part of Hell is the separation from the love of God forever and ever.

Even though there will be sin, hardships, and pain here on earth, there is love and joy. Christians experience joy with families, friends, and in life in general because they feel God's love. In Heaven, there will be pure everlasting joy and love forever. In Hell, there will be no joy and no love of God.

Acts 16:31 says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." Saved from Hell and saved from the separation of God.

Believe is a stronger term in the Greek language than the way we Southerners use the word today. As we might say, "Well I believe it might rain today." Believe means to trust, have faith in and depend upon completely. Jesus Christ did all of the work on the cross. We just accept that perfect sacrifice as we would accept a birthday or Christmas gift.

Ephesians 2:8-9 says it beautifully. “For by grace you have been saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift from God, not of works lest any man should boast.” There’s nothing we can do to earn salvation. If there was anything we could add to this precious gift, then Christ died needlessly. Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins. God the Father was totally satisfied with the sacrifice that God the Son made. If you think, “Wow! That’s just too easy,” remember that it wasn’t easy for God.

Hebrews 13:20 teaches that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit sat down in eternity past and formulated the blood of the everlasting covenant. My works nor your works were done when the everlasting covenant was agreed upon. God did all of the work that needed to be done, and God takes His promises seriously.

God the Son put on skin and came to this earth to pay a debt He didn’t owe and that we could not pay. When one accepts Jesus Christ as his/her Savior, the Holy Spirit comes to live within him. Our body is then the temple of the living God. And God wants us to have a relationship with Him. As the Bible says in Colossians 2:6, “As ye have received Christ Jesus, so walk ye in Him.” We accepted Christ through faith and now we can walk with Him by faith, day by day and moment by moment...a walk with our Savior. As you walk with Jesus Christ, He will grant you strength day to day, grant you peace, and His light will so shine in you and it will bear witness to others.

How blessed we are to have been given the mind of God--His Holy Word. Just think about it...How do you get to know a person? You spend time with that person. How do you get to know God? Spend time with Him.

One of the saddest stories in the Old Testament is in II Kings 22. In 630 BC, Josiah’s father Amon died, and Josiah became king at the age of eight. When he was 16, he started spiritual reform in Judah, and at 26, he was in charge of cleansing and renovating the temple which had been ignored and used as a warehouse.

As Josiah was leading the charge to cleanse the temple, a copy of the law was found! God’s Word had been lost for two generations! As Josiah read the scriptures, he wept and tore his clothes because of how far the people were from God and His Word. How far are we from God and His Word? Are we studying and indoctrinating ourselves with the mind of the God of this universe? Are we fellowshiping with other believers and sitting under a Bible teaching/preaching pastor? Are you growing in the knowledge and wisdom of Him? I challenge you to get involved in Bible study. God has used Explorer’s Bible Study in my life to make me dig and truly study the word of God. Awake each morning with your Savior and walk with Him daily.

My pastor, Brother Tommy Snyder, has taught me so much about how important a daily quiet time is. Reading and immersing yourself in God’s Word and organizing your prayer life should be at the top of your to do list! Fight for those minutes with your Savior! In John 15:5,

Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing." If we abide in Christ daily, He will use us and bear the fruit that is pleasing to God. Apart from Him, we can do nothing! We're useless. As the years go by, I realize that this life is a blip on the radar. I urgently encourage parents to remember to put the spiritual first. Teach your children. Pray with your children. Take your children to a doctrinally-sound church. Don't waste time. I implore you to focus on your spiritual life, and let God work a work in you!